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ABSTRACT

In 1984, the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen undertook a nationwide literacy campaign, which mobilized the entire nation in an effort to reach an estimated 194,000 illiterate people, 77 percent of them women. The campaign plan demanded the full and active participation of formal school teachers and students at secondary level and above as literacy teachers and supervisors. The campaign lasted from July to December to take advantage of the summer vacation. School in rural areas was also delayed until January 1985 to allow students to participate. The Higher Committee for the National Literacy Campaign designed strategies and concrete activities to achieve campaign objectives--to eradicate illiteracy among 12- to 35-year-old females and 12- to 40-year-old males. Mobilization extended beyond the education sector to involve Local Defense Committees and mass organizations, the media, and special activities to stimulate interest. Literacy activities included transmittal of literacy teacher training and literacy lessons by television and radio; incentives to motive students and teachers; organization of literacy teachers and supervisors into cells, units, and platoons, which allowed for a flexible, informal approach; and development and distribution of literacy materials. Results indicated an overall participation of 187,000 illiterates. It is estimated that over 155,000 of these joined the ranks of the literates as a result of the campaign. (A diagram of the campaign's organization is appended.) (YLB)

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Annex 1 : Organigram of the 1984 Literacy Campaign

1. Introduction

In 1984, the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen undertook a nationwide literacy campaign which mobilised the entire nation in an effort to reach an estimated 194,000 illiterates, 77 per cent of them women. The campaign was very successful; 187,000 illiterates were enrolled in classes during the six-month campaign, and it is estimated that over 155,000 of these joined the ranks of the literate as a result of the campaign.

This short paper focusses on the factors that made the campaign a success, and particularly on the process and method of mobilisation employed during the campaign.

2. PDRY - The country

PDRY covers 333,000 square kilometers at the south-west corner of the Arabian Peninsula. Rugged mountains, deep wadis and, to the north and east, desert, ensure a spartan existence for most of the 2.2 million population, two-thirds of which is rural.

PDRY is a progressive state, with enlightened health and education policies committing the government to provide essential social services to the masses at low cost. The delivery of basic services and communications is difficult, although television has a major impact, reaching over 80 per cent of rural communities. There exist effective networks --of the Yemeni Socialist Party, of mass organisations and community-level Local Defence Committees, the latter composed of Party and mass organisation leaders and responsible for mobilisation activities in their areas.

3. Why literacy? Why a campaign?

> *"With these alone (the weapons of science and knowledge) can we raise the political, economic, social and cultural standards of the masses, and thereby realize their positive participation in the various aspects of the life of society".*
>
> (Translated from the Plan of the National Comprehensive Campaign for the Complete Eradication of Illiteracy and the Establishment of a Popular Education System, 1983).

A basic tenet of the Yemeni Socialist Party (YSP), since independence in 1967, has been that a new society can only be built effectively on

the foundation of a literate population. Every development in the community --economic, social or political-- is seen to be affected by the educational level of the people, by the level of their social and political awareness.

In the first years of independence, the YSP studied the revolutionary process in a number of socialist states --China, Vietnam, Cuba, later Ethiopia and Nicaragua-- and it was evident that revolution was followed quickly by a mass mobilisation for literacy, to make the population aware of, and able to participate in, the revolutionary process.

The YSP viewed, and views, the promotion of literacy as a revolutionary task, an essential step towards the creation of a New Society and the New Citizen. Thus as early as 1970, the illiteracy eradication and adult education movement was launched. In 1974, Law No. 32 of 1973 was promulgated for the eradication of illiteracy; even at this early stage, the campaign method was cited, whereby other agencies and organisations besides the Ministry of Education should be mobilised if significant progress were to be made in fight against illiteracy.

Thus the 1984 campaign took place against the backdrop of a historical commitment of political will to the eradication of illiteracy. The decision to undertake the 1984 mobilisation was a political decision which demanded that the YSP, as well as other organs of society, had to be involved at every level.

4. The launching of the Campaign

In 1980, the Extraordinary General Congress of the Yemeni Socialist Party emphasised its concern that all possible measures should be taken to develop popular education. As an outcome of this Congress, Law No. 9 of 1980, concerning Literacy Eradication and Adult Education, re-affirmed the 1973 law, and embodied the need for the Party, government and people to continue the struggle to eliminate illiteracy as quickly as possible.

By this time, senior cadres in Party and government had been confirmed in their conviction that the complete eradication of illiteracy was a unique task that could not be achieved through a classically planned, formalistic approach to education. Such a drive, it was re-affirmed, required a special emphasis to harness the enthusiasm and imagination of the population in a way which the regular process of formal education development was unable to do.

Thus in the latter part of 1982 and throughout 1983, the General Directorate for Literacy and Adult Education developed a plan for a national campaign whose objective was the "total elimination of illiteracy".

With strong support from the YSP, it was agreed that the country would be ready to mobilise for a campaign in 1984. It was decided that the campaign should last for six months, from July - December 1984.

5. Why July - December 1984?

The campaign plan demanded the full and active participation of formal school teachers, and students at secondary level and above, as literacy teachers and supervisors.

Thus the campaign would have to be timed in such a way as to optimise the mobilisation of students in particular, with the least interference to their studies.

It was decided that the campaign should be launched in July, since the three-month summer vacation began in that month. Then in an exceptional move, the opening of the new school year, normally to begin in October, was delayed until January 1985. All secondary schools, teacher training institutions and the Faculty of Education, were closed from October to December 1984.

For primary schools, teachers were advised that where they could combine formal teaching and literacy work, formal schools could stay open. Where this combination was not possible, literacy work would take precedence, and primary level schooling should cease for the education of the campaign.

In the cities where literacy rates were already high, primary schools opened on schedule in October, but in rural areas, primary schools were also closed. This permitted:

- Secondary students to become literacy teachers;
- Primary school teachers to become guides (to supervise groups of five teachers);
- Secondary and post-secondary teachers to become supervisors of guides.

6. The magnitude of the illiteracy problem

The 1973 census estimated that 46.4 per cent of the population over 10 years of age was illiterate. Extrapolations in 1982 led to the conclusion that 360,000 Yemenis over 10 years of age were still illiterate. But where were these people, and how could they be identified?

At community level, the Local Defence Committee (LDC), composed of representatives of both the Party and mass organisations, is responsible for coordination of political activities and for mobilisation of the community to meet national political, economic and social goals. In 1983, all Local Defence Committees were authorised to undertake a "mass census", to collect data on each family within their jurisdiction.

Although LDC members were not systematically trained in data collection, and allowing for mistakes in data collection, it is estimated

that 90-95 percent of all families were covered by the mass census, which sought to identify illiterate women in the 12-35 age group, and illiterate men in 12-40 age group.

These age groups were selected on the assumption that:

- People above the age of 12 years were unlikely to have further opportunity to be enrolled in formal primary school;
- It would be difficult to motivate women and men above the ages of 35 and 40 respectively, to participate in a literacy programme.

In the target age groups, a total of 194,000 illiterates were identified, of whom approximately 150,000 or 77 per cent were women.

7. The goals of the 1984 Campaign

The immediate objective in the campaign plan was to eradicate illiteracy in the 12-35 years female and 12-40 years male age groups.

This was to be done through the waging of a literacy campaign over a six-month period, which would mobilise the masses, and utilise to the maximum the potential and energies of all party and mass organisations, government agencies, the media, students and teachers.

A medium-range objective was the establishment of a follow-up system to continue providing the newly-literate with broader educational skills that would enable them to continue study and training and become participants in the mainstream of social and economic development of PDRY.

Finally, a broader goal was to construct a popular education system that would enable the masses to develop their potential, skills and behavioural patterns, through a continuing process of vocational or mass cultural education and training.

8. The Higher Committee for the National Literacy Campaign

Through a Resolution issued by the Prime Minister, the Higher Committee for the National Literacy Campaign was formed to design strategies and concrete activities to achieve the objectives of the campaign.

The Higher Committee was a large body, composed of the following members:

- Prime Minister (Chairman)
- Secretary of the Central Committee (CC) for Ideology

- Assistant Secretary of the CC for Mass Organisations
- General Secretaries of all mass organisations, namely:
  - . The General Union of Yemeni Women;
  - . Youth, Workers and Peasant organisations, and
  - . The Defence Committees organisation
- Secretary of the Education Workers Union
- Deputy Ministers of Education; Planning; Information; Culture; Labour and Civil Service; and Finance
- Director-General of the Education Research Centre
- Assistant Deputy Minister for Literacy
- Representatives of each of the Six Governorates, namely:
  - . First Secretaries of each Governorate YSP Committee
  - . Governors
  - . Directors of General Education
  - . Directors of Literacy.

This Committee of approximately 40 people was composed of four subcommittees:

. **Political and Information Subcommittee,** responsible for development of mobilisation strategies for all participants in the campaign --the mass organisations, media, LDCs, government and recreational organisations, the education system, and the population at large.

The subcommittee was headed by the Secretary of the CC for Ideology; its secretary was the Assistant Deputy Minister for Literacy. Members included representatives from the LDC organisation, mass organisations, and the media (television, radio, the press, the Writers Union and Intellectuals Union).

. **Technical Subcommittee,** responsible for all educational, technical and administrative matters related to the identification of strategies and activities for the training of teachers, guides, and supervisors, and for developing teaching and training manuals.

. **Logistics Subcommittee,** responsible for budgetting, allocating financial responsibilities and cost-sharing between involved bodies, identifying material requirements and coordinating the purchase, production or printing, as appropriate, of all material inputs.

. **Planning and Statistics Committee,** responsible for bringing together all subcommittee plans into an overall campaign plan, for analysing and reviewing data collected since campaign preparations began in 1982, and in particular, data generated through the "mass census".

A link between the various subcommittees was the Assistant Deputy Minister for Literacy, who was secretary of three of the subcommittees (excluding the Logistics Subcommittee).

In each of the Governorates, Committees were also formed on similar lines (see Annex 1: Organigram of the 1984 Literacy Campaign).

9. The Campaign - Mobilisation beyond the education sector

9.1 LDCs and mass organisations

At the beginnin of the campaign, Local Defence Committees and mass organisations held general meetings with the population in each village, in workplaces, in schools. The reasons for the campaign and the benefits of literacy for the development of the nation were emphasised.

In each area, forthcoming events and the organisation of literacy classes, were explained; explanations were provided of how the population at large could participate in the campaign. Illiterates were exhorted to study, and citizens to provide voluntary support to the campaign, for example to help out-of-town teachers and supervisors by providing accommodation, to provide classroom places in homes, meeting places, even to provide cold water, tea or food for teachers during class time. Some communities provided gasoline for transportation of teachers. The participation of so many community members in so many ways to support the campaign was one of its most rewarding features.

Events --street demonstrations, parades, carnivals-- were organised from national to local level, and inaugurated by leaders of the Party and government, national and local.

9.2 The media

The media --newspapers, TV and radio, were used to great effect. TV had particular influence and impact, given its coverage of over 80 percent of rural communities in the country.

TV and radio programmes initially explained what the campaign was all about. During the campaign, talk shows, reports, on-the-spot interviews, highlighted progress in the campaign, where new classes were opening or events taking place, where materials could be expected and when, or human-interest stories from local residential areas or individual literacy cells (classes).

Special songs and poems, representative of regional characteristics, had been commissioned, and these were continually broadcast on TV, on radio and issued through the press.

TV and radio also transmitted special teacher training programmes, and daily reading and writing lessons to parallel classwork going on in residential areas (See Section 10 below).

9.3 Special activities

During the six months of the campaing, a series of events and mobilisation tools were used to stimulate interest and constantly impress on the population the importance and vitality of its involvement in the campaign. These included:

- a football match between two top national league teams;
- issue of special literacy postage stamps, and use of special postage stamp franking and cancellations with literacy messages;
- thematic literacy posters;
- photographs of literacy classes on matchboxes;
- literacy badges;
- a 50 fils (15 U.S. cents) literacy tax on liquor, cinema tickets, and other services;
- a literacy tax of half a day per month, for six months, on the salaries of all government and parastatal agencies' employees.

(See also Section 10 below on motivation and incentives for literacy students, teachers and supervisors).

9.4 The importance of women's literacy

Since 77 per cent of the target group illiterates were women, media programmes and local organisation mobilisation activities, while emphasising the need of literacy for all member of society, did broadcast particular messages focussed on the importance of women's literacy.

One slogan, for example, stated that: "Teaching the women is teaching the family". The Egyptian poet Ahmed Shouki was often quoted in broadcasts and the press: "The mother is a school; if you prepare her well, you can guarantee preparation of the new generation".

Media messages also harked back to colonial days, when women had no chance to progress, and compared those days with the present day progressive policies of PDRY with regard to women.

10. The Campaign - Mobilisation within literacy activities

10.1 The media

Prior to initiation of the campaign, the radio and TV transmitted training programmes for literacy teachers, outlining what the literacy campaign was to do, what should be taught and how, psychological and social aspects of teaching, student guidance and motivation, and how teachers should prepare reports on progress in their classes. This use of broadcast media is stated to have provided very strong motivational support to teachers, through constant positive reinforcement and stimulation to remain involved in the literacy process.

Throughout the campaign, TV and radio daily broadcast literacy lessons to help students who may have missed classes, and also those who had to rely on learning through distance teaching, where teachers were scarce (see below ref. self-help learning).

10.2 The LDCs, mass organisations and opinion leaders

Throughout the campaign, leaders of LDCs and mass organisations, education leaders, government ministers, were constantly visiting class sites to encourage and support teachers and students, and to give them a sense of involvement in a national process.

10.3 Motivation and incentives for students and teachers

A number of incentives were provided to motivate both students and teachers, eg:

- the granting of medals and certificates of merit to outstanding students and teachers;
- bringing into prominence (particularly through the mass media) names and photographs of those literacy students and teachers who excelled during the campaign;
- consideration of the period of participation in the campaign by both students and teachers as part of their national military service;
- consideration of participation in the campaign, and successful accomplishment of tasks, as an important factor in selection criteria for scholarships, training courses and employment.

10.4 Organisation of literacy classes

As previously stated, students and teachers were mobilised as literacy teachers and supervisors; they were organised into "cells", "units" and "platoons":

- the **"cell"**: led by a "pioneer" (a secondary or post-secondary student, or *Unity school graduate) responsible for teaching 5-7 literacy students;

- the **"unit"**: led by a "Guide" (a Unity school teacher), responsible for guiding activities of 5 pioneers;

- the **"platoon"**: led by a supervisor (a secondary school teacher) responsible for 7 guides.

A platoon supervisor was thus responsible for overseeing the training of at least 175 literacy students, and worked in closed coordination with Residential Zone and Sub-District Campaign Committees in particular, reporting progress or problems during the course of the campaign.

The basic teaching unit, the "cell", was formed almost anywhere where it was feasible to organise a literacy class, for example whether in schools or cultural centres, private homes or under trees. As the plan document explained, a cell might be founded in a "formal" way, that is by opening a class for a literacy group in a school building where practicable, or in an "informal" way.

The informal approach was flexible and allowed maximum local discretion: cells could be even smaller than the norm, and in some cases might consist of only one individual; or the cell might be larger than the norm, and taught by one or more pioneers. Some cells of students might rely on distance learning, using radio or TV as the main means of instruction, reinforced by group self-help and periodic visits from teachers or guides covering several cells. As previously stated, throughout the literacy campaign period, lessons were broadcast daily on TV for literacy students relying on distance learning or for those who may have missed classes.

The "classroom" could be in a home, under a tree, or any other non-formal setting. Basically, "any method of informal education that consolidates the mass spirit of the campaign by utilising mass, group and individual media of communication"** could be considered as a valid vehicle for combatting illiteracy.

The timing of literacy classes was also subject to local choice and local convenience. Individual classes were 2-3 hours long. The majority were held in the afternoon period between 2-6 pm, although it was found that many women preferred the period between 3-5 pm, which still allowed them to perform their normal work in or outside the home.

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* Unity Schools combine primary and intermediate grades 1-8.

** Quoted from the national plan document.

10.5 The content of literacy materials

Technical manuals for teachers were written and distributed. The principal teachers' instruction manual was entitled: *Let Us Struggle To Free Our People From Illiteracy*. There was also a manual for teachers on how they should report on their activities.

The literacy reader, *We Read*, had been published some time before the campaign, but was now reprinted in large quantities. The themes in the reader focussed on Yemeni family life; chapters represented day-to-day life situations, and also emphasised new traditions, the social and political responsibilities of the family in a new society, and expectations about the role of the family in the nation-building process.

Towards the end of the campaign, almost as an afterthought, a small committee of health professionals, mass organisation representatives, artists, educators and UNICEF, worked to quickly identify simple, key child survival messages. Four themes were isolated, emphasising the importance of breast-feeding, diarrhoea control and oral rehydration, maternal care and child immunisation.

TV programmes, booklets and posters on these themes were quickly produced. A national meeting of Governorate officials was organised to explain the messages and how to deliver them most effectively. In the Governorates, meetings of supervisors, and then at local level, of teachers, were organised for the same purpose.

In the last 10 days of the campaign, these messages were discussed and delivered through the literacy classes, through posters and TV, the latter playing, once again, a particularly important role. Unfortunately, given the late start to development and propagation of these messages, materials did not reach everywhere in time to support classroom discussions.

11. The aftermath - What next?

The results of the campaign showed an overall participation of 187,000 out of the target population of 194,000 illiterates. The drop out rate was only 14 per cent and 83 per cent of the participants passed the final literacy test. However, the view now holds that some people must have slipped back into illiteracy since 1984.

Since the campaign, some 20,000 people per year have remained enrolled in post-literacy classes, for which thematic readers have been, and are being printed and distributed with UNICEF support. Themes of the readers relate to child survival, development and protection, to maternal care and to the woman at work. A major goal of post-literacy activities is to encourage neo-literates to enrol in the Basic Education Programme, which provides a condensed primary education equivalency.

In 1987, a resolution has been passed to create the national Adult Education Council, chaired by the Prime Minister, to develop a programme to eradicate illiteracy completely and to reinforce an adult education curriculum which will provide intermediate formal schooling equivalency. Three adult education textbooks on general health, appropriate technologies for women, and nutrition and agriculture, are to be produced.

If resources are made available, a new post-literacy campaign may be considered to promote adult education and eliminate illiteracy. Before this happens, an assessment will be necessary of the level of literacy already attained.

ORGANIGRAM OF THE 1984 LITERACY CAMPAIGN